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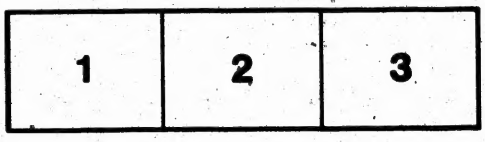

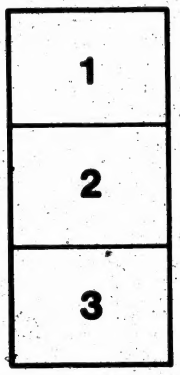

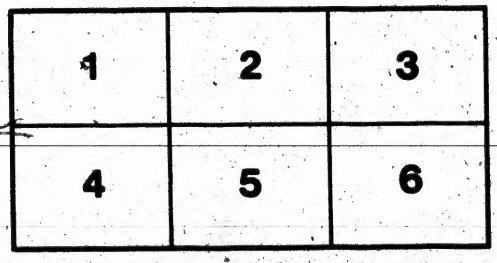

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The Perfect Law of Liberty:

A

SERMON,

PREACHED AT TRINITY CHURCH,

STREETSVILLE,

ON

SUNDAY, XIIth JULY, M.DCCC.XLVI.

BY

THE REV. R. J. MACGEORGE,

INCUMBENT OF TRINITY CHURCH.

TORONTO:

PRINTED AT "THE CHURCH" OFFICE.

M.DCCC.XLVI.

TO THE MEMBERS OF

THE ORANGE ASSOCIATION,

YORK DISTRICT,

No. 1,

AND THE OTHER ORANGEMEN OF CANADA,

THE FOLLOWING SERMON

IS INSCRIBED.

Streetsville,
12th July, 1846.

SERMON.

"But whoso looketh unto the perfect law of liberty, and continueth therein, he being not a forgetful hearer, but a doer of the work, this man shall be blessed in his deed."—St. James i. 25.

The Almighty is free, and therefore man, as he proceeded from His creating hand, was free also. For, as we read in the Word of Truth, "God created man in his own image" or similitude. To a certain extent, though in a very inferior degree, he was a moral, or spiritual copy (so to speak) of his Maker. But, alas! man, "being in honour," did not long retain his privileges. That arch-agitator, that first of rebels, the devil, spread his meshes around him. He sowed discontent in his soul against his kind and indulgent Sovereign,—persuaded him that he was not his own master,—and whispered in his too confiding ear that he could live independent of the Lord of the Universe. And the tempter prevailed. Adam gave way to the infernal suggestion. He took and eat of the fruit of the forbidden tree, and in one instant lost his integrity. In one instant the blessed union between earth and heaven was dissolved; the golden chain which connected the creature and the Creator was snapt and dashed to atoms.

And what was the consequence? Did man gain what he expected by his act of treason? Did he become as a "God, knowing good and evil?" He lost his knowledge of the one, and his hatred of the other. He lost all things good. He lost holiness,—he lost happiness,—he lost life,—and he lost *liberty*. He became a servant to corruption, a vassal to his own lusts, a degraded slave of Satan and sin. Before, he was an heir of the kingdom of heaven. Now, he was the miserable bondsman of the republic of hell, subject to the mob-rule of his depraved and lawless passions.

Even such, my Christian brethren, is the condition of every one of us by nature. However much pride may spurn at the confession, the fact is as undoubted as it is sad, that we come into this world with the chains of bondage rivetted to our limbs. By nature we are the children of wrath, the enslaved subjects of the Prince of Darkness, without strength to break his yoke, and, what is worse, without inclination to disobey his commands.

Thus must all of us have lived, thus must all of us have died, wretched and hopeless, had not He, against whom only we had sinned, taken pity upon our low and lost estate. He who at first said, "Let us make man in our own image," resolved to re-create him in and after that blessed and holy similitude. In the fulness of time the Deliverer came,—God was manifested in the flesh,—the second Adam atoned for the guilt of the first Adam and his countless generations. And when on the cross Emanuel bowed his head and said, "It is finished," and gave up the ghost, victory was wrested from death, the fetters were struck from the slave, and a new and living way, which hell itself could not shut, was opened up, by which the weary captive might have access to the Father.

But how are we to participate in the blessings of this great salvation? Enfeebled as we are by sin, how are we to walk in this glorious way? Through faith in the crucified Redeemer. Christ not only died to purchase for us freedom, but he bestows the gift upon all who come unto him. By his Spirit he forms us anew, purifies us from our natural corruptions, and gives us strength to fight with success against the world, the flesh, and the Devil, those merciless tyrants, those hard and cruel task-masters. This is LIBERTY in the full and genuine sense of the word. "If the Son shall make you free," says the Apostle, "ye are free indeed." Look at an unconverted man, what a perfect picture of a slave does he present. A slave to sense,—to covetousness,—to lust,—to unbelief,—a slave, in one word, to all that is vile, crawling, and abominable. But behold him after the blessed Spirit has caused

the precious seed to spring up into the beauteous tree of holiness, and how mighty is the contrast. It is now his meat and drink to do the will of his Father which is in heaven. Walking in the Spirit, he fulfils not the lust of the flesh. He stands forth a pattern of every thing which is pure, and lovely, and of good report. He brings forth abundantly the fruits of the Holy Ghost, "love, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance." To sum up, he rejoices in the liberty with which Christ has made him free.

Yes, my friends, the Gospel is the true Magna Charta.—To it the genuine patriot ever looks. By its rules and maxims he is ever guided. For here alone he knows the treasure is to be found, and he regards with suspicion and distrust every political or social system which is not based upon the rock of God's most holy word. And for this, among other reasons, that experience has demonstrated that liberty at no time has permanently flourished when divorced from religion. Christianity is the sun, without which the fair flower must pine, and wither, and die.

Open the pages of history, and see what the preaching of the pure truth, as it is in Jesus, has done for mankind even in a mere worldly point of view. The stream which took its rise on Mount Calvary eighteen hundred years ago, has continued to run, and swell, and increase, ever since that eventful hour; and, wherever it has shaped its course, refreshment, and fertility, and life, and peace have followed. Take one instance out of many. Look at our own beloved Britain.—In her state of darkness and idolatry, there was not a more wretched, degraded, or enslaved land on the face of the globe. The great mass of her inhabitants were but little if anything removed from the level of savages. Comfort was a word equally unknown in the castle of the Thane, and the hut of the Serf. And often was the atmosphere darkened and polluted by the smoke of the flames, in which human victims were offered up to their hideous and bloody idols. Anon the Cross was planted amid our ancient oaks. The proclamation

which told of salvation through the God-man, echoed among our mountains and valleys, and all things became new. The Druid Temple was dashed to the ground, and from its ruins arose the gentle, peace-speaking Church of the living God. Then commenced the reign of British liberty. Then was laid the first stone of that matchless Constitution, which, marred as it has been of late years by reckless hands, is still the admiration and envy of the whole world. And now that little obscure Island, occupying but a speck on the terrestrial map, is GREAT Britain,—great in power, great in commerce, great in solid and substantial freedom. Equally removed from monarchical despotism, and from the more degraded tyranny of a licentious democracy. Britain has not, like too many nations, omitted religion, when constructing her government. Her motto has been, "Church and State,"—"The Bible and Crown." She has honoured God, and therefore God has put honour upon her. To use the words of my text,—she has looked unto the perfect law of liberty, and continued therein, and so she is blessed in her deed.

And woe be our land if she apostatise from these her ancient principles. Woe be to her if she lend an ear to those wily demagogues, who would have her to blot out Christianity from her Constitution. Who say, build prisons for the bodies of your criminals, but erect no Churches for their souls.—Endow the hangman, but leave the clergyman to the tender mercies of voluntary alms: to become the menial instead of the director of his flock; their flatterer, and not their reprover. I know God can do all things. I know God can support, and has supported, his Church independently of the State. But He works by means: He has declared that Kings should be her nursing fathers, and Queens her nursing mothers. And if a nation go in direct opposition to His will, can it reasonably look for His blessing?

The experiment of government without religion was tried within the memory of many of you, on the largest scale.—France declared against the fetters (as she called them) of

religion, murdered her monarch, and renounced her God?—Was France happy? Was France free? All of you can answer the question. "The miseries suffered by that single nation, have changed as it were all the histories of the preceding sufferings of mankind into idle tales. The kingdom appeared to be turned into one great prison, the inhabitants converted into felons. The sword, the bayonet, and the guillotine rested not from their crimson task by night or by day. It seemed for a season as if the knell of the whole nation was tolled, and the world summoned to its execution and funeral. In the short space of ten years, three millions of human beings perished in that single country, to prove *how happy and free a nation can be without God.*"

The Devil, if he cannot destroy openly, will deceive, and so destroy indirectly. His great aim and object is the ruin of souls—his great purpose, to keep mankind miserable and enslaved. He felt that he could not uproot the gospel tree, for it was planted by God's own hand, and watered and fostered by his Spirit. He had therefore recourse to stratagem. He took upon himself the form of an angel of light. Under the name of Christianity, a system came by degrees into existence, where truth was linked with error, the Word of God with the follies and fancies of men. Superstition was added to superstition,—every age furnished a contribution to the heap of rubbish, till at length the Babal Tower was completed, and then it was named Popery!

Time would fail me even to glance at the leading delusions, the cunningly devised fables of the Church of Rome. Their name is legion, for they are many. Suffice it say that "the perfect law of liberty" was virtually repealed. Mankind were forbidden to enquire the Creator's will at himself. God's word was not allowed to take its "free course," and so be gloried in the conversion of sinners. The Bible was closed and bound in fetters of brass, forged at the Vatican. Christ indeed was retained, but substantially little more than in name. Dishonour, foul dishonour, was done to the efficacy of his

atonement. The blood of Jesus cleanseth from all sin, said the Scripture. No, exclaimed the Pope—not so. Creature merit is also needful—and penance is needful—and the flames of purgatory must lend their aid before the sinner's soul can be fit to meet its God in peace.

Well did the skilful and deadly scheme work. Millions of poor sinners were enticed from the new and living way which leadeth unto life, and taught to worship, if not the whole host of heaven, at least a less brilliant host of earth. A host of so-called Saints,—embracing, doubtless, some worthy of the name, but including not a few who died not in the odour of sanctity, but in the rankness of lust, ambition and unbelief. Jehovah was robbed of his exclusive honour, and a portion,—and that a large portion,—was doled out to creatures he had formed. Thus did the Priests of Rome, like the Priests of Jerusalem, make the word of God of none effect by their traditions, and "darkness covered the land, and thick darkness the people."

But the Anglican Church was not left to languish in this pestilential fog. Her Great Head said "let there be light, and there was light"; and the kindly wind of the Reformation purified her altars from the dust of Romanism, and restored their ancient evangelical beauty and simplicity.

Other nations were not so highly favoured. Many to this very day want the "*perfect law of liberty*," and in their condition we may behold a dreary practical illustration of the truth, that without a spiritual knowledge of Jesus Christ and him crucified, there can be neither prosperity nor freedom.

Look at Italy—at Portugal—at Spain.—See how they have fallen from their high and palmy estate. Their learning, their commerce, their chivalric renown, have all passed away like a vision of the night. A nobility without spirit—traders without enterprise—a population ignorant and poor, and a locust-like swarm of shaveling friars, "blind leaders of the blind,"—speak with sad eloquence of Rome's power to blast the social, as well as the spiritual, interests of the human race.

But we need not travel into those regions for proof of what I have advanced. In the native land of many a one now before me, he who runs may read the sorrowful truth. Yes—in Ireland you may behold the working of the bane and the antedote—of the blessing and the curse. That beautiful but sore distracted country, furnishes me with all the illustrations I require. Would the happy day were come when it presented only the bright side of the picture—the sunbeam without the cloud.

Go into the province of Ulster, and you see a happy, a peaceable, a loyal, and a prosperous people. The land well cultivated—manufactories abounding—commerce extending her branches in every direction. You find education, secular and religious, diffusing its blessings around. You find God's word widely circulated and read, and the Sunday kept holy. Exceptions, of course, there are, as there are to every rule; but I think I am borne out in saying that such are the leading features of Protestant Ulster.

Change the scene. Take staff in hand, and journey towards the south, and what, in too many districts, do you behold? The very reverse of the picture we have just been contemplating. Improvement of every description seems nipt in the bud. Ignorance and superstition rule with an iron hand, and their power is known by their fruits. The sky is reddened with the incendiary's fire. The quiet of midnight is broken by the report of the murderer's musket, and the scream of his hapless victim. The efforts of honest industry are cramped and shackled; and the farmer is often forced to quit his fields at the threat of the tyrant mob—forced to abandon the roof-tree which from infancy had sheltered him, least a worse thing befal him;—least the blood-hound of murder seize him in the midst of his family, or the assassin's shot strike him down at the plough.

What is the cause of this mighty contrast—occurring in the same kingdom—between a people governed by the same laws—ruled by the same sceptre—enjoying the same rights

and ptivileges? I think there can be but one answer.—In the North, Christ reigns; in the South, his glory is given to another. In the North, the Bible is open, and prosperity and freedom beam from its pages. In the South, God's word is closed, and the clouds of error, and the mists of ignorance, brood upon all things—alike upon body and soul, and blighting in the bud prosperity and liberty, both temporal and spiritual. We may apply to them the awful words of Isaiah ii. "Because they have transgressed the laws, changed the ordinances, broken the everlasting covenant, therefore hath the curse devoured the earth, and they that dwell therein are desolate."

I say not these things to stir you up against your poor misled fellow-countrymen.—Far from it. It is the error alone we are to denounce and protest against. We are to pity, and love, and pray for the victims of the dreadful delusion. In this, as in everything, we are to follow the example of our Master Christ, who, while he painted sin in its true colours, as abominable and deadly, wept over the sinners, and died for their salvation. The "heart's desire and prayer to God" of every true Orangeman for the Romanists should be "that they may be saved." We are not to conceal one jot of the truth because it may offend, but then, we are to speak the truth in love.—Thus alone can we destroy error and win souls.

As an Association, you take high and most solemn grounds. The qualifications which you consider essential for a member are, (I quote from the Regulations) that "he should have a sincere love and veneration for his Almighty Maker, productive of those lively and happy fruits, righteousness and obedience to his commands. A firm and stedfast faith in the Saviour of the world, convinced that he is the only Mediator between a sinful creature and an offended Creator. His disposition should be humane and compassionate,—a lover of rational and improving society: faithfully regarding the Protestant religion: zealous in promoting the honour, happiness, and prosperity of his King and Country."

These, I repeat, are high grounds for any one to take. In fact, they are a public repetition of your baptismal vows.—Oh! pray for grace to be impressed with a deep feeling of your responsibility. Believe me, you are marked men. The Romanist, the Infidel, and the rebel, have their eyes steadily fixed upon you. And when you turn aside from the right path,—when you cease to live up to your rules,—you give the enemy a fearful vantage. The ungodly, immoral Orangeman, is the bitterest foe to Protestantism, to the Bible, and to God. The Papist and the unbeliever point to your excesses and exclaim, "behold the tendency of their principles!" And thus, in addition to your own damnation, you may have the blood of many a poor soul to answer for at the judgment day. The early Christians were known by their walk and conversation. The world, seeing their blameless lives, "took knowledge of them that they had been with Jesus." Even so let it be in your case. So conduct yourselves that the world may be able to point to each individual of your body and say, "Such a one is holy, loyal, and just. He reverences the name of his God, and honours his Queen. He remembers to keep holy the Sabbath day. He prizes the Church, and diligently avails himself of the means of grace committed to her care. The voice of prayer is daily heard within his dwelling. Surely he is an Orangeman." The man, of whom these things cannot be said, is untrue to his professions, fights under false colours, and is a traitor to the cause he pretends to support. I can conceive of nothing more revolting than the boisterous lip-loyalty of such an Orangeman, perjured as he is in the sight of God and man.

Of yourselves, you can do nothing aright. However strictly you frame your rules, you cannot keep them by your own unaided strength. Not one of you by nature is sufficient for these things. Oh! be instant then in prayer for strength from on high, to walk worthy of your vocation as Christians. May Christ by his Spirit enable you to live godly, righteous, and sober lives to the glory of his holy name. Forget not

that you are engaged in a stern warfare. Like Derry, the citadels of your souls are besieged by a host of inveterate foes, led on by the world, the flesh, and the Devil. Like the Apprentice boys, shut the gates of your hearts against their advances. Give not up the struggle, however hardly you are pressed, however fiercely you may be tried with the artillery of temptation. Continue stedfast to the end, and you shall receive a crown of glory which fadeth not away, eternal in the heavens. Be ever looking into the perfect law of liberty. Be not forgetful hearers, but doers of the work, and then you shall be blessed in your deed. While you stand forth on all fitting occasions for your civil and political rights, omit not to be constantly striving for an interest in that emancipation from sin purchased for you with the blood of God's own Son. And let these words be emblazoned on your banners, and imprinted on your hearts:

"*He is a freeman whom the truth makes free,*
And all are slaves beside."

FINIS.

ANGLICAN CHURCH OF CANADA
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